Party democracy revisited

Members and activists evaluate intra-party democracy in Norway 1991-2009

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Abstract

The general question is whether parties – in spite of a declining membership – are still serving national democracies by providing a supplementary channel for political participation, information, debate and decision-making. The empirical data are based on party member and delegate surveys to the seven parliamentary parties in Norway from 1991 to 2009. I first look at the ability and the capacity of party members to make an impact on party policies. The second theme is how party members and Congress delegates evaluate decision-making and internal democracy within their respective parties. The active party milieu constitutes about 2 percent of the electorate. A fair share of members engage in very instrumental activities directed at influencing policies, and the parties have not lost their ability to communicate directly with their members. I find that Norwegian parties are still viable arenas for political debate and decision-making – in spite of quite dramatic losses in numbers of members. Members support the view that an ordinary member has a fair chance of winning the local branch over to his or her point of view. They also think that the leadership listens to the views of party members and they do not think it a problem that the leadership is too strong. However, personal connections are definitely considered crucial to influence national decisions. The changes in the period are surprisingly few. We note, however, a tendency for party members to be slightly more active, and also more satisfied, suggesting that it is the most politically engaged members that remain in the parties. The trend is in favor of more rather than less democracy within Norwegian parties.

Political science of the rationalistic brand leads to some puzzles when accounting for political behaviour. One is the “voting puzzle” which is “why should anyone vote, knowing that the likelihood of this vote making a difference to the outcome is virtually nil”\(^1\)? Similarly there is a “party member puzzle”: “Why would anyone become a party member, knowing that parties are oligarchic organizations and that democratic parties are not needed to support national democracy?”

One answer is that citizens do not act only to maximize individual influence. There are normative standards, social, psychological, economic and career motives that transcend the instant goal of maximizing influence. There are more answers to these puzzles, but consider the premises for the “PM puzzle”. First, are parties oligarchic by nature? Few scholars, I believe, would today argue according to Michels’ (1911/61) “iron law” that the party elite always decide, the tautological interpretation apart. The relevant issue is not whether the elite have more influence than the ordinary party member – obviously they do – but rather “do elites have more, or decisive, influence on all issues, or only the most ‘important’ ones?”, “to what extent can the elite disregard obvious member majorities on a particular issue?”, “how large is the elite?” and, finally, “always?”. The issue of party democracy is one of degree, not “either or”. It is about placing parties along a democratic continuum, a question of how democratic and how oligarchic.

Second, does national democracy build on democratic parties? Not necessarily as expressed in Schattschneider’s classic statement that “democracy is not to be found in the parties but between the parties” (1942:60).\(^2\) The essence is that the voters must have political alternatives at the elections and that it is through voting over these alternatives that citizens sustain democracy. The argument that democracies also need democratic parties is complex and circumstantial. King summarized six basic tasks assigned to parties: structuring the vote, integrating and mobilizing the mass public, recruiting political leaders, organizing the government, forming public policies, and aggregation of interests (King 1969:120). Much of this can be done by parties without a democratic structure, like Berlusconi’s “Forza Italia” or Geert Wilders Dutch “Freedom Party”. What these parties cannot do is to give their members an arena for political training, for debating issues within a politically comprehensive frame,

\(^1\) See e.g. a rational choice answer to this Kanazawa 1998.
\(^2\) This could be interpreted as argument based on the US political context but also as a general comment on parties in democracies. Schattschneider considered it an advantage if we could “abandon the whole concept of party membership, the mental image of the party as an association of all partisans, and to recognize frankly that the party is the property of the “organization”” (1942:61).
for policy-making and the selection of candidates for public office. Politicians trained within a
democratic party are probably better equipped to uphold democratic processes in public
positions. A (fairly) democratic party will also provide the party representatives in public
office with a link to a politically engaged and informed middle-layer of citizens. The party
membership will at best give professional politicians a linkage and a milieu outside the
professional ghetto for debating policy positions and priorities – both before and between
elections. These functions may be perverted, no doubt, and the party activists may be out of
touch with the ordinary voters, in which case their party will face doom at election times. The
modest rationalistic case for democratic parties, however, is that it is less likely that a party
system with only non-democratic parties will offer the voters adequate alternatives at the
elections, compared to a party system where at least some parties have a fairly democratic
structure.

In this paper I shall look at internal democracy in Norwegian parties. What happens to party
decision-making when members leave the parties in large numbers? Does party democracy
suffer or is it actually a boost for remaining “quality members” to take back their role as party
owners? First I shall briefly survey literature on party decline and party change to show how
this issue feeds into the current party debate. Second I will look at the ability of Norwegian
party members to influence decision-making by actually taking part in party activities. Third I
will analyze the perceptions of party members and Congress delegates on how democracy
works within their party. The overarching question is whether Norwegian parties, in spite of
the massive membership decline, still operate as linkages between the professional party elites
and the citizens.

**Party change: More centralization, fewer members – less democracy?**

The general message in the literature is that democratic parties are central in linking citizens
to political decisions in democracies (Katz and Crotty 2006). At the same time there is
massive evidence of party change which makes the linkage mechanisms increasingly
questionable. First there are the changing modes of party operations, increasingly
professionalized, media-dependent and state-dependent. In various combinations these
developments are baked into landmark conceptions of party change as expressed in the
“catch-all” model of Kirchheimer (1966) and the cartel model of Katz and Mair (1995 and
Integrated in these models of party change is centralization of party decision-making, the “disempowering of the activists in the party on the ground” (Katz and Mair 2009:759).

In the “decline of parties” literature the shrinking membership in parties is the major indicator. No doubt the general change of party membership in Europe since the 1970s has been decline. In the latest account of membership change in 19 European countries between 1980 and 2008 all but three countries declined in overall membership in the range of 25 to 70 % (van Biezen et al. 2012:34). In Norway the decline was 63 % with only the Czech Republic (from 1993) and UK having greater loss of members. In their survey of the literature van Biezen et al. note that party members seem to be fairly unrepresentative of the voters in socio-demographic terms although less ideologically extreme than expected. Still, the decline in membership is in their view so enormous that “level of membership no longer offers a meaningful indicator of party organizational capacity” which questions their ability to provide a linkage between the mass public and the central political institutions (p. 40). Increasingly parties also sideline the activists by introducing broad based ballots for leadership election, making formal membership less important.

There are also efforts to keep and attract members by giving the ordinary member a greater role in party recruitments and policy making (Whiteley 2009). On the bases of voter surveys from 36 countries from 2004 (International Social Survey Program) Whiteley shows that party activists and members “play a major role in supporting political participation across the democratic world” (2009:146), indicating that declining party membership may have serious implications for the general level of political participation, threatening the link between the mass public and the political elites.

Two questions seem especially crucial given this trend in European party membership. First there is the empirical question of whether party members are active and contribute to decision-making to an extent that can supplement the media link between political elites and voters. The second question is how many and how active these members have to be in order to uphold a linkage function in democratic politics.

Methods, expectations and data
Comparatively there is both a lot and quite little research on internal party democracy. There are lots of interesting case-studies and much research relating to the problem of internal party democracy. Interestingly, however, no article in the Handbook of Party Politics (Katz and Crotty 2006) deals exclusively with this, although that is not to say that party democracy is not discussed in the book. The point is that this is not a research field generating systematic empirical analysis of the type that we find on democracy at the state level.

Research on democratic processes takes many forms and the best answers are not to be found in any one particular method. Studies of party democracy employ different methods, mapping organizational structures, case study analyses of decision-making, survey analysis and interviews. All help in painting the broader picture. On the premise that the party has one particular standing on the democracy continuum, all of these methods should in principle produce the same result for a particular party at a given time. But clearly, all methods also have their particular problems.

Another troubling question is “what are we actually looking for”? What is a democratic party? Are we able to specify the empirical indicators of such a party? Naturally, this would be a party where the member majority – after a broad and fair debate – decided, perhaps not all issues, but at least the policies defining the basic political direction of the party. The party would need organizational structures for democratic debate and decision-making, like national conferences with delegates elected at least indirectly by the members, or party referenda. The decision making ought also to cover both policy-making and candidate selections. In a democratic party members would need to be integrated in the party organization, i.e. participate in party processes, being informed about political issues and involved in discussions. We would also expect members and party activists to express their satisfaction with the democratic qualities of the decision-making process. One cannot expect everyone inside a party to be satisfied, whatever the process, but at least a solid majority of the membership should express satisfaction. In short, we would expect members of a democratic party to express that they can make a difference.

The expectation following from general literature is that both party organizational changes and the massive decline of party membership would lead to party democracy having very meager soil in contemporary European parties. Changes in the context of party decision-making points towards a decline in internal democracy. In an article from 2004 a colleague and I analyzed democracy within Norwegian parties (Saglie and Heidar 2004). We presented
survey material on how the party members and Congress delegates evaluated intra-party democracy. We expected that increased pressure for external efficiency and public visibility, i.e. the voter and media focus, would lead to more centralization, less emphasis on the party membership and consequently less party democracy. We found nothing of the sort and concluded there was little evidence that these parties had turned less democratic over the recent years. Although the parties were declining as membership organizations we found that “decision-making practices and structures of Duverger’s mass party model prevail” (2004: 402). One decade later and with continued decline in party membership I would expect member activism to have declined and also that members would experience decreased influence within the party organization.

In this paper I will in part look into some of the same issues as in the 2004-article, although on the basis of an extended data set which includes member and delegate surveys from 2009, making it possible to consider changes over two decades – from 1991 to 2009. The time span makes it possible to survey changes in member activities and influence which have been largely lacking in previous research. I will first look into the ability and the capacity of party members to make an impact on party policies and party recruitments. My second and main theme will be how party members and Congress delegates evaluate decision-making and internal democracy within their respective parties. Do they find that their fellow party members take part in internal policy-making? Do they have influence? Does the party leadership listen to the party grass roots? And do they listen mostly to the members or to the voters?

The Norwegian membership data is based on three rounds of postal surveys. 400 party members, in the seven parties represented in the Storting, were randomly selected in 1991 and 2000. The overall response rate was 68 % in 1991 and 61 % in 2000. In 2009 we selected 1000 party members randomly in each of the (same) seven parties, and the overall response rate was 49 %. For details on the various surveys, see Heidar 1994, Heidar and Saglie 2002 and Jupskås 2010. Comparisons with available variables for the total membership (gender, region and age cohorts) indicate a good representatvity also for the 2009 sample. One deviation was found for age as the youngest cohort was slightly underrepresented in some parties. The deviations for the ‘under thirty’ are not large (between 1 and 3 percentage points), although larger for Labour (11 points). In all surveys the party members were weighted according to their party’s relative share of total membership whenever we present figures for the total, i.e. for ‘Norwegian party members’.
The congress delegate data are surveys with all party delegates to the yearly or bi-annual congresses of the same parliamentary parties (numbering from about 200 to 300 delegates). These surveys are from 2000/2001 and 2009 which were the congresses leading up to the Storting elections in 2001 and 2009. At these congresses all parties finalized their election programs. In 2000/2001 the response rate for the delegates was an overall 71 per cent, and in 2009 it was 55 per cent.

**Ability and capacity to influence**

With membership decline in most West-European countries there is a limit to how small the party membership can be for the parties still, and with some credibility, to claim to be “political workshops” for the members. How many party members are left in the parties? Is there an active debating milieu inside the parties – party members discussing issues and priorities based on the central values guiding the party? Do parties uphold a milieu for political engineering, for debates on the good society and the way to get there? In short: Do parties have a membership that enable parties to fulfill the role assigned to them in democratic theory?

First to the question of nominal members. Table 1 reports the membership figures in Norwegian parties as given by the parties themselves. The reliability of reporting can be questioned, but they correspond roughly to figures reported in population surveys when respondents are asked about membership in parties. The numbers are – with a few exceptions – in decline, from a total of 402,000 members in 1990 to 168,000 members in 2009. Over two decades the parties have lost 58 % of their membership.

But members are of different kinds, some are active while others in practice are passive and without intensions of contributing to the internal party debate. Figure 1 gives a general overview of the member activity and how this has changed. About half the registered members did not take part in any party event during the last year, roughly 10 % showed up on one occasion only while about 40 % were active members in the sense of participating at minimum two party meetings a year. If we look at the latter group of “party actives” there is a

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3 In 2009 7 % reported party membership in the Election Study (Frode Berglund, Ingvild S. Reymert og Bernt Aardal, Valgundersøkelse 2009. Dokumentasjonsrapport, Statistics Norway: Notater 29/2011 ) which indicate 240.000 members. The parties themselves reported 170.000.
weak trend towards the membership becoming more active. The percentage taking part in more than one party event rose from 36 to 43 in the years from 1991 to 2009. However: this is a rising percentage on a declining base.

We see from Table 2 that the share of the total electorate enrolled in parties declined with 5 percentage points between 1991 and 2009. Based on the party member survey the total share of the electorate that was active within a party declined from 3.6 to 2.1 per cent. We base these calculations on a rather modest claim to activity, participating in at least two party events during the previous year. If we calculate the numbers of active party members, we find around 72,000 party activists in 2009. That’s the size of the “party membership channel” in Norwegian politics – broadly defined. In comparison the number of candidates on the party lists for the local communal elections, which is the closest we get to the total number of citizens recruited to fight for political offices in Norway, is about 60,000. It is not the case that all 60,000 party candidates are among the 72,000 party activists but most likely there is a high degree of overlap. In Table 4 we shall see that roughly 20% of all party members (about 35,000 people) are engaged in local municipal work. Parties will of course mostly recruit local candidates from their pool of active party members, and if not in that pool before election members will probably feel obliged to become more active within the party after entering public office.

What is it with party members of today that make participation so rare? In Table 3 we see that about two in five members actually had no intention of attending party meetings. They view their membership as general support to the party, and this figure matches well with the fact that about half did not take part in any activity. The share of “support only” members are slightly declining as the total membership goes down. The reasons given for not attending party meetings are, however, fairly stable over time. More than two thirds of the membership is not able to come to meetings due to private and work related reasons – like family, illness, working hours and education. Party participation competes with other obligations and preferences in the hectic lives of party members, and it seems there are little parties can do to change this. They clearly are trying (Heidar and Saglie 2003:225). We can note, however, the declining trend of members stating “lack of influence” as the reason for not attending party events. This matches well with the trend found in Figure 1 showing rising member activism. Together these figures may indicate a slight “purification” of the membership base following the general decline in the number of members: The people finding it worthwhile to join and stay on are also more inclined to participate in party affairs.
This raises the issue of what kind of activities the members engage in. Some are, as noted, active in public office, but Table 4 also shows that 43 per cent (2009) discuss issues and candidates with other party members, up from 35 per cent in 1991. Eight per cent (included in the 43 %) address party meetings or write in the party press and 15 percent take part in preparing motions within the party – all these activities are increasing in the period. Moreover, 20 per cent hold office in the local party branch and close to three in ten also contributes financially to the party. Externally the party members also show considerable engagement. Two thirds discuss the party’s policies with non-members, taking on the role as “party ambassadors” (Scarrow 1996) seriously. Some 14 and 17 per cent fight for party policies in the media and take part in demonstrations or external party arrangements. In general, there is a small but noticeable trend towards an increasing share of the party membership becoming more active. But again, as the total membership is decreasing the numbers of active members are still decreasing.

How do party members get the information they need for their political activities? Are the parties becoming less central in supplying members with the “right” information? In Table 5 we see that the public media are by far their most important source of information. At the same time about two thirds of the membership gets political information from party documents, while half the group report party meetings and public documents as important sources. Least important on the list is the Internet, although that’s also the great change – not surprisingly – between 2000 and 2009. The share reporting this as an important source increased from 22 to 41 per cent.

In sum the member activities tell us that the parties are major arenas for political engagement and debate, today perhaps somewhat sparsely populated, but still arenas with active participants. The active member segment is not large, about 2 per cent of the electorate, but this makes up roughly 72,000 people that are taking part in party meetings and debates. We should not exaggerate the activism found: Party meetings are not generally like the frenetic pre-exam seminars on campus, but we find an active group of party members, informing themselves about party affairs, debating issues and candidates. Compared to the standard image of today’s parties – that the parties are organizations for a few professional politicians only, without any active membership – this is clearly not the case in Norway. We may conclude that here is a potential for party democracy. But do the members’ experiences confirm that the potential is realized?
Evaluating decision-making and internal democracy

The question is whether these active members have any real influence in party decision-making. Obviously, “real” is a big word and “democracy” is anyway (as noted above) an amorphous concept. Here we pursue an answer by asking members and congress delegates how they evaluate the decision-making processes inside their party.

We saw in Table 1 the dramatic changes in party membership indicating that much can happen in a decade in the life of parties. What to expect in terms of democratic experiences? In the article from 2004 we expected a trend towards more centralization (Saglie and Heidar 2004). The catch-all argument from the late 1950 pointed to an increasing electoral focus within a media-driven environment. This perspective suggested a strengthened leadership with an operative party goal of catching increasing voter markets even at the expense of ideological purity and party traditions (Kirchheimer 1966). Similarly, the later cartel party thesis was based on the leadership becoming less dependent on the party membership for their resources, as the state stepped in to finance party operations and marketing (Katz and Mair 1995). However, the member evaluations changed little between 1991 and 2000. Was change delayed by organizational inertia?

Most members are engaged in local political affairs. As noted many party members were candidates at the local public elections and at this level the members – at the least - should have the experience of influence in a democratic party. In Figure 2 we see how party members perceive ordinary members’ influence within their local branch. Over the period from 1991 to 2009 roughly 40 % of the members had no opinion. This seems reasonable given that about 50 % did not take part in any party event last year (Fig. 1). Clearly it is difficult to evaluate the influence of members if you do not visit your local branch much. Thirteen to seventeen per cent reported that disagreements were rarely expressed at the branch meetings, indicating that consensus dominated. In 2009 28 per cent stated that ordinary party members occasionally or quite often could win the branch for his or her point of view, while 19 per cent said the leadership usually wins. If we calculate the opinion balance between those stating that the “leadership usually wins” minus “members win” (occasionally or quite often) there is a moderate trend indicating that the influence of rank-and-file members in the local branch – contrary to expectations – have been strengthened between 1991 and 2009. A possible
explanation of this can be that the shrinking of the party membership base has led to a larger share of “quality members”, meaning that members participate (slightly) more and are also able to make their influence (slightly) more felt within the organization.

In all surveys we asked the members the more general or “party wide” question of whether the central party leadership is good at paying attention to the views of ordinary party members. This question focuses on internal party politics in general, not only the local branch context. Again we see in Figure 3 that quite a few members neither agree nor disagree. Among those expressing an opinion, however, there is a majority agreeing (somewhat or completely). In 2009 38 per cent of the membership agreed that the leadership is good at listening while 11 per cent disagreed. The figures on the opinion balance also show a rise in favor of the view that the leaders are good listeners. Speaking from the ranks of ordinary members, these are hardly the figures of oligarchic organizations, nor indications of increasingly centralized parties.

In Table 6 we introduce two more indicators, one on the importance of personal connections, the other on whether it is seen as a problem that the leadership is too strong. The answers here give more varied feedback on democratic experiences. The response to the personal connection issue tells us that party decision-making not necessarily always follows “the book”. Personal relations are considered crucial and much more important than formal positions in the party to “influence decisions in the central party leadership”. These are strong words, however, and when 56 per cent in 2000 and 64 in 2009 agree that personal connections are much more important than formal positions, the rather rosy image of party democracy found in the previous figures are challenged. At least on the national level party members obviously have experiences – or at least have “heard about” – the hidden backroom politics where things are “really decided”. Very few disagree with this verdict, only 6 per cent. Moreover, “network politics” is on the increase.

On the other hand, a problem of a too strong leadership is not acknowledged by the membership. 44 and 50 per cent disagrees while 18 and 13 per cent agrees, respectively in 2000 and 2009. The opinion balance between the “agrees” and the “disagrees” are also dominantly negative, and increasing from 26 to 37 per cent points. By and large the members are of the opinion that the party leadership is paying attention to members and they do not considered the leadership too strong. However, to influence the national party decisions you ought to be on personal terms with influential persons in the party.
In the catch all perspective party leadership should listen increasingly to the voters at the expense of the party members. Do the members agree that the leadership should take on a stronger voter focus – at their own expense? Is this what is needed to win elections to the best for party policies? Member opinions on this issue are presented in Figure 4, showing that in 2000 31 per cent agreed with the statement that the leadership should listen more to the voters while in 2009 this had declined to 22. The opinion balance declined from plus 2 to minus 13. There was in other words a slight majority agreeing with the voter focus in 2000 but this had changed in 2009. Supporters of the catch all party had lost ground, quite the opposite of the expectation. Again we may see this in the perspective of more “quality members”, members that wants to be present and to have influence. A hypothesis to pursue in another context would be if such an “activist turn” in party organizations leads to members becoming increasingly different – also in policy terms – from the party voters. This would be a trend predicted by the well-known May’s law of “curvilinear disparity”, that the activist membership hold more extreme political views compared to voters and leaders (May 1973). We must also consider, however, the fact that about one third of the members had no opinion (Figure 4). Seen in this perspective, two thirds of the membership was open for an increased voter focus, and only 15 per cent disagreed strongly. And that, clearly, must be taken in support of dealing with members in a catch all party.

**Conclusion**

In this paper we have addressed two questions: What is the potential for a member-based democracy within Norwegian parties, and – if potential – do the active members also experience decision-making influence. From comparative membership data we know that Norwegian parties, just like in most other West European countries, have lost large portions of their membership during the 1990s and the 2000s. Only one party, the Progress Party, increased its membership during this period. For the other Norwegian parties the decline varies between 83 and 26 per cent.

The other side of the coin is that the parties had a slight increase in the share of members turning up for party events and taking part in decision-making processes. Given a generous definition of what it takes to participate in the party processes – more generous than
previously admitted (Heidar 1994) – I find that the active party milieu constitutes about 2 percent of the electorate. However, there are no fixed criteria for how much is “much” and how much is “little”. If the point of reference is that parties in democracies should be a political activity-channel for broad groups of citizens, this is obviously “little”. If the standard is to recruit politically engaged segments in order to set up a linkage between politicians and citizens, I would argue it is “fair”. The details also show that a fair share of members engage in very instrumental activities directed at influencing party policies. Nor have the parties lost their ability to communicate directly with their members as the party information channels are still important sources of information as seen by the members themselves. In sum, Norwegian parties are also today viable arenas for political debate and decision-making – in spite of quite dramatic losses in numbers of members.

Do members have influence? In the perceptions of the members the short answer is “yes”. Members favor the view that an ordinary member has a fair chance of winning the local branch over to his or her point of view. They also think that the leadership listens to the views of party members and they do not think it a problem that the leadership is too strong. However, personal connections are definitely considered crucial to influence national decisions. Moreover, the leadership is advised not to listen more to the voters than to members for policy guidance. There are changes in the period covered from 1991 to 2009, but surprisingly few of any significance. We may note, however, a tendency for party members to be slightly more active and also more content with their ability to influence, suggesting that it is the most politically engaged members that remain in the parties. The effect of declining membership figures are – is seems – somewhat moderated by the fact that the least active are leaving in greater numbers than the more active. The trend is in favor of more rather than less internal democracy in Norwegian parties, although this should of course not cloud the fact that Norwegian parties have declined much in number of members, also active members.

Noting the activity of party members and their level of satisfaction with internal decision-making processes, it seems quite unreasonably that the parties are more or less neglected in the literature on deliberative democracy. Norwegian parties both have fairly active members and a broad based internal decision-making processes. The party leadership is not making party decisions in isolation; they are listening to the membership and the membership feels included. The party linkage between elite and mass is still operative. This lack of interest in parties as deliberative arenas is possibly due to a false opposition between the operations of aggregation and deliberation (Ware 1979, Teorell 1999, Johnson 2006). Democratic parties
and deliberative democracy are invariably linked, as aggregating and balancing opposite interests in order to formulate a realistic program for political change, cannot be done without evaluating across-sectorial consequences and giving priority to some interests over others. I agree therefore with Warren (2009: 33) that “ideally, parties would begin to view themselves as elements of a deliberative political system that generates public legitimacy for them and their candidates through public arguments…”

Do Norwegian party members make a difference to Norwegian democracy? This is a broad question. No doubt it is a negative trend within the party channel that the membership is declining. It seems nevertheless premature to conclude that “the party is over” (Broder 1971) or that parties do not offer a linkage functions between political elites and the broader public. Membership figures are only one of many indicators on how parties contribute to democracies. Parties will change and may adapt to changing circumstances to keep their position. According to Dalton et al. “political parties as agents of representative democracy are alive and well” (2011: ix). From the data presented in this paper it appears that the traditional tasks of parties are still taken care of. Parties continue to have the potential to be political workshops, linking segments of the political active citizenry and the party elites, bringing forward comprehensive political packages based on considerations for the whole of society and not only offering single issue programs to the voters. It is worth noting, that in the comparative list of party membership as a percentage of the electorate in Europe Norway is in the ninth place (Biezen et al. 2012). In other words, parties in eight countries are better positioned to take on the deliberative role potentially found in active party milieus.4

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4The eight are: Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Italy and Belgium, see van Biezen et al. 2012, p. 28.
References


van Biezen, Ingrid, Peter Mair and Thomas Poguntke 2012. „Going, going,…gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe“, European Journal of Political Research 51 (1), pp.24-56


APPENXIX:

Party democracy revisited: TABLES

Ability and capacity to influence

Table 1: Party members 1990–2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Socialist Left</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Christian People’s</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>All parties</th>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>13 072</td>
<td>128 106</td>
<td>47 117</td>
<td>56 176</td>
<td>11 345</td>
<td>146 308</td>
<td></td>
<td>402 000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>9 318</td>
<td>72 557</td>
<td>46 627</td>
<td>56 612</td>
<td>7 180</td>
<td>78 145</td>
<td>4 976</td>
<td>275 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>7 428</td>
<td>58 768</td>
<td>31 557</td>
<td>47 864</td>
<td>6 552</td>
<td>63 993</td>
<td>11 824</td>
<td>228 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>10 591</td>
<td>51 576</td>
<td>20 987</td>
<td>40 408</td>
<td>5 798</td>
<td>27 334</td>
<td>16 848</td>
<td>174 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>9 723</td>
<td>57 584</td>
<td>20 690</td>
<td>23 703</td>
<td>7 244</td>
<td>25 054</td>
<td>23 713</td>
<td>168 000</td>
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<td>% decline 90-09</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% decline 00-09 (rise marked +)</td>
<td>+30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>+11</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>+100</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>% voters '09</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>

Source: Jupskås. Figures basically from the parties’ yearly reports
Notes: In order to be representative of Norwegian party members, the figures are weighted. Unweighted N (1991) = 1,890, unweighted N (2000) = 1,721, unweighted N (2009) = 3,314. Question was: ‘Did you last year take part in any party events – branch meetings, seminars, gatherings, parties?’

Figure 1. Participation at party events during the last year (percentage)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Electorate '000</th>
<th>Party members '000</th>
<th>Party members as per cent of electorate</th>
<th>No of party members participating in more than one party event</th>
<th>Per cent of electorate that participate in more than one party event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991/93</td>
<td>3.260</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>3.360</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3.500</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Election statistics from Statistics Norway, table 1 and figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private reasons*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational career</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boring meetings</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of influence</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive supporting member</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total**</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted N</td>
<td>1,890</td>
<td>1,721</td>
<td>3,314</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Question was: “When you don’t attend party meetings – what are the two most important reasons?” In 1991, there were eight fixed options and one ‘other, specify’ category, which was coded into four groups. In 2000 and 2009, there were twelve fixed options. Some of these categories are merged in the table: ‘Private reasons’ - family, other leisure activities, illness, old age; ‘Occupational career’ - job, education, other organizational activities; ‘Other reasons’ - difficult to get into established party culture, long way to meetings, badly informed about meetings, no meetings held. Weighted figures. * As noted, question format for 1991 is not comparable with 200 and 2009. ** Asked to present the ‘two main reasons’, the percentages add up to more than 100.
Table 4 Participation in party activities during the last year, and holding party or public office (percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed issues/candidates with other party members</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Also addressed a party meeting or wrote for the press</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Also took part in the preparation of motions within the party</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in a study circle arranged by the party</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of executive committee in municipal or local party branch</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Held other office in municipal or local party branch</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed the party’s policies with non-members</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took part in demonstrations or other public events arranged by the party</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote in the press, defending party policies or criticizing other parties’ policies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was member or deputy member of the municipal council</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was member of a municipal committee</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donated money to party funds or election funds (beyond membership fee)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted N</td>
<td>1,890</td>
<td>1,721</td>
<td>3,314</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Evaluation of sources of political information (percentage) 2000 and 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Radio, television, newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Personal contact with fellow members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Party newspaper, party documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Public documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Party meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very or quite important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less or not important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Question was: ‘How important are the following sources to you, when you look for information about politics?’
* Very/quite important minus less/not important. Weighted figures.
Evaluating decision-making and internal democracy

Figure 2. Perceptions of party members influence in local branches among party members, 1991, 2000 and 2009 (percent) *

Q: What is your impression of the chance of an ordinary party member winning the local party branch over to his/her point of view?


Balance of opinion (Leadership wins minus members wins):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balance of opinion</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 3.** Perceptions of the leadership's attentiveness among party members, 1991, 2000 and 2009 (percent)*

Q: The central party leadership is good at paying attention to the views of ordinary party members.

* To be representative of Norwegian party members, the figures are weighted. Those who did not answer, an average of 4.1 %, are excluded. Unweighted N (1991/2000/2009): 1816/1620/3230. Significance (chi square) test 1991-2000, 0.000.

**Balance of opinion (Agree minus disagree):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balance of opinion</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal connections are crucial</td>
<td>A problem that the leadership is too strong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2000</strong></td>
<td><strong>2009</strong></td>
<td><strong>2000</strong></td>
<td><strong>2009</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree completely</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree somewhat</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree slightly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree completely</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance of opinion**</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance ***</td>
<td>0,000</td>
<td>0,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted N****</td>
<td>1571</td>
<td>3208</td>
<td>1565</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: (a) To influence decisions in the central party leadership, personal connections are crucial and much more important than formal positions in the party. (b) A problem with the party today is that the leadership is too strong.

*Those who did not answer (10 percent of members in 2000 and 3 percent of members in 2009) are excluded.

** Percentage stating agreement minus percentage stating disagreement.

*** Significance levels are based on chi-square tests.

**** Missing N is excluded from unweighted N
Figure 4. Norms on member and voter influence among party members, 2000 and 2009 (percent)*
Q: The leadership should listen more to the voters than to the members.
* Those who did not answer (7 percent of members in 2000 and 3 percent of members in 2009) are excluded. Unweighted N: 2000: 1602; 2009: 3225. Significance (Chi-square) test 1991-2000, 0.000

Balance of opinion (Agree minus disagree):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balance of opinion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>